

Latin Abbreviations for Academic Writing

*Latin is a language
Dead as dead can be
It killed off all the Romans
And now it's killing me.
-Unknown Author*

Despite the fact that Latin is technically a dead language (i.e. no longer spoken and changing), it has heavily influenced English; many Latin phrases and abbreviations are still found in modern texts and used in everyday conversation.

Using Latin Abbreviations

Because they are often misunderstood and misused, Latin abbreviations should be used sparingly, if at all, in formal writing. Most sources agree that writers can make use of abbreviations in footnotes and references but should otherwise avoid them. In most cases, the English translation of the abbreviation can be substituted with no detrimental consequences.

If an abbreviation must be used, writers must be certain they choose the correct abbreviation. A good way to ensure that the abbreviation chosen is actually the one the writer wants is to substitute the English translation of that abbreviation and see if the sentence still makes sense.

Substitution Example

L: My teacher asked me to hand in my paper after the end of Spring Break (i.e. March 17).

E: My teacher asked me to hand in my paper after the end of Spring Break (that is, March 17).

Note: Many people confuse the abbreviations *i.e.* and *e.g.*; *i.e.* means *that is* and *e.g.* means *for example*. Utilizing the substitution rule modeled above should eliminate that confusion.

Common Abbreviations and Translations

<i>Abbreviation</i>	<i>Latin</i>	<i>English</i>
cf.	confer	compare
e.g.	exempli gratia	for example
et al.	et alii	and others
etc.	et cetera	and so forth, and so on
i.e.	id est	that is
N.B.	nota bene	note well
P.S.	post scriptum	post script